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CHINESE SILK RUG, SEVENTEENTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



JAPANESE (?) RUG, EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

CHINESE RUGS

OLD Chinese rugs have been known in this country for only a few years. Even in Europe they seldom come into the market, and none of the museums there have any examples worth mentioning. Our Museum therefore is far ahead in comparison, for we have lately added ten examples to our collection of Oriental rugs. Opinion concerning the beauty, age, and value of Chinese rugs is still unsettled. Many scorn them, giving their preference to Persian rugs, without considering the fact that our eyes need training to comprehend any newly discovered field in the art of Far Asia, as we have for several decades been accustomed to the carpets of Near Asia. Others are so enthusiastic that they rather overdo the matter, in many cases dating Chinese

rugs back as far as the oldest Persian carpets. There can be no question but that through these rugs a new field is opening to our vision, and that in a short time textiles will, in our esteem, stand on the same level as other products of Chinese art.

If one wishes to study Chinese rugs correctly, it is better not to compare them with those of Persia, although it seems only natural to do so; one should rather study them in connection with other productions of Chinese art—textiles, paintings, porcelains, and bronzes, in which similar principles are used.

Chinese rugs differ from the Persian in material, weave, design, color, and composition. The design is mostly of straight, geometrical forms, in which the hooked fret takes the place of the curves of the Persian arabesque. The pattern of the field is simpler; sometimes it is finished as if cut off, without a border and in a wave-like design. Round and oval forms, which are seldom if ever found in Persian rugs, are often to be seen in those of the Chinese. The Chinese rugs are lighter in color than the Persian, the field being, generally, light yellow of different tints ranging from greenish-yellow to orange and pink, from which the design stands out in blues of different shades. The remarkable combinations of colors found in Persian antique rugs, such as the deep red and green, and red and yellow, are not used.

The best examples of the Chinese rugs seem to be those of the Ch'ien Lung (1736–1795), Chia Ch'ing (1796–1821), and the Tao Kuang (1821–1850) Periods; so far, at least, as we can judge from what we now know of them. However, even if these rugs do not date so far back as do the Persian



CHINESE RUG, CH'EN LUNG PERIOD (1736-1795)

(the best period of which was the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), it does not make any difference in their value, since the age does not necessarily guarantee the quality.

These rugs may be divided into three classes: the modern, those of the Tao Kuang Period, and the earlier ones of the Ch'ien Lung Period.

The modern examples, which are imported here in large numbers and which are often sold as antiques, are mostly rough imitations of the rugs of the early nineteenth century and are not to be considered in this article.

Rugs of the Chia Ch'ing and Tao Kuang Periods (early nineteenth century) are generally mistakenly attributed to the Ch'ien Lung Period. These are blue and white, or blue and pink, in which sprays of flowers surround one or several medallions in the field, while the borders show naturalistic floral designs, or the fret pattern in perspective. Rugs of this class exist in innumerable variety, but are mostly of the same composition; they are sometimes of great beauty, having the colors very well preserved, with the exception of the pink, which is generally faded. The flower branches in European design, the butterfly motif, and the borders remind us of the porcelain of the same period. The Museum has acquired an interesting example of this period in which the medallions are made up of fantastic dogs playing with a ball and deer fighting with a phenix—one of the oldest Chinese motifs, which was borrowed by the Persians.

To the last group belong the oldest known rugs—those of the Ch'ien Lung Period. All of the motifs in these, the shape of the dragons, the bats, the literary implements, the vases—which are characteristic of the porcelains of the period—and the conventionalized lotus flower are found in the other works of art of the period; and the Persian influence, which appears frequently in rugs of this character (the lotus flower and the Tree of Life with animals standing under it) comes from Persia's art of the seventeenth century. These rugs have real Chinese character, without European influence and with the

motifs borrowed from Persia transformed in an original manner. In the border, and sometimes in the middle field, we find the meander, or fret pattern, in a simple line design, which in later rugs is shown in perspective. Most of the pieces purchased by the Museum are of this group. There is one with the whole field covered with a lotus-flower design in a straight conventional manner, in light blue and brown on a tender, green-white ground. Another shows the border and field covered with a fret interspersed with bats, the symbol of happiness, alternating in yellow and light blue. Another, especially attractive, has a well-balanced design of straight lines and curves shown in pleasing contrast. The pattern is made up of conventionalized dragons and the fret finished with two borders, one of the *fylfot* and hook ornament, the other of a leaf design.

Our most interesting rug, however (and if any seventeenth-century Chinese rugs exist, this is one), is a small silk piece, which is exceptional in that it has a light design (small dragons and sacrificial tables) on a darker ground of a beautiful deep blue, with a border ornamentation done with purple bats on a background of yellow and blue key pattern. A piece like this will convince one by careful study that Chinese art was able to produce textiles quite the equal of those of Persia. W. V.

PORTRAITURE OF WASHINGTON

THE action by which the City, through the Park Department, deposited in the Museum a bronze copy of Houdon's statue of Washington made a welcome addition to our already large collection of Washingtoniana. An account of the original statue, which was made by order of the State of Virginia, and which stands in the hall of the Capitol at Richmond, was given in the July BULLETIN. It seems timely, in this issue of February, the month in which we celebrate his birth, to enumerate briefly the portraits and busts of Washington to be found in the Museum's collection.

The Huntington Collection of Washington portraits is well known and so are the